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Peace talks: indexical master tropes and their potential for conflict in the construction of national identity

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Abstract: This paper employs discursive constructivism to delineate four rhetorical paradigms of nationalist discourse and to compare their potential for conflict. It proposes a four-fold typology which sees the intuitive tropes of antithesis and simile, and the counterintuitive metaphor and irony as structuring principles for national self-images. These are four modes of constructing a cultural deixis, that is, a relationship between national self and its cultural other. The paper argues that the frequency and magnitude of nationalistic conflicts may be minimized by the steady and widespread counter-enculturation of the non-conflictual discourses of analogical (simile-based), metaphoric, and ironic nationalisms. This argument is illustrated with examples from modern and recent Romanian history, but may be taken to epitomize the condition of most postcommunist European nations.

Keywords: nationalist discourse, national identity, master tropes, conflict analysis, cultural deixis

Pourparlers pour la paix: des tropes principaux indexicaux et leur potentiel de conflit dans la construction de l'identité nationale

Résumé: Cet article utilise le constructivisme discursif pour présenter quatre paradigmes du discours nationaliste et comparer leurs potentialités respectives à générer des conflits. Il propose une typologie quadruple qui considère les tropes intuitifs de l'antithèse et de la comparaison et ceux contraires à l'intuition de la métaphore et de l'ironie comme principes structuraux de l'image de soi-même nationale. Il s'agit donc de quatre modalités de construire une déixis culturelle, c'est-à-dire une relation entre l'être national et l'autre culturel. L'article soutient que la fréquence et la magnitude des conflits nationalistes peuvent être diminuées par la contre-enculturation des discours non-confliktuels des nationalismes analogique (fondé sur des comparaisons), métaphorique et ironique. La démonstration est basée sur des exemples qui sont empruntés à l'histoire moderne et récente de la Roumanie, mais peuvent être

considérés représentatifs pour la situation de la majorité des nations postcommunistes de l'Europe.

Mots-clés: discours nationaliste, identité nationale, tropes principaux, analyse du conflit, déixis culturelle

Nationalism is often construed as a unidimensional ideology (or even social pathology) which is responsible for ethnic and racial violence (see, for instance, Danilo Kiš's "On Nationalism" or Tom Nairn's *The Break-up of Britain*). The view is broadly embraced but it really comes from confusing nationalism with xenophobia, racism, jingoism, chauvinism, or populism. At best, nationalism is only deemed acceptable in its "good" variety (Western and liberal or civic), unlike the "bad" sort, which is ethnic or racial and which comes from the East (including Eastern Europe). This paper disputes such opinions and instead takes nationalism to be a consistent and legitimate endeavor to construct collective self-images by means of various structuring discursive mechanisms. I am calling these mechanisms "indexical master tropes", as they position the subject in a world of national groups and shape relationships between the national self and its cultural others. As such, nationalism becomes not only acceptable, but also diversified, as each of its constitutive rhetorical paradigms displays a different attitude towards cultural alterity and a varying potential for conflict.

The methodology with which I am working here is a variant of the discursive constructivism to be found in Edward Said, Benedict Anderson, and Homi Bhabha (Ștefănescu, 2016, p. 91-104 and 2013a, p. 90-8, 160-2). This means that I take nations and national identities to be discursive representations (Michael Billig, 1995, p. 8-10, 60-92, Stuart Hall, 1996, p. 612-3, Craig Calhoun, 1997, p. 22, and Uzun Özkirimli, 2000, p. 229-232) rather than the mechanical result of historical contexts or social instruments as in objective constructivist theories.¹ I will categorize the complex array of structuring rhetorical acts of nation-building into four discursive paradigms, and will compare their various potentials for predisposing subjects to non/conflictual attitudes.

My approach starts from the theory of "master tropes" provided by Kenneth Burke in *A Grammar of Motives*. Hayden White has defined them as "the dominant modes of discourse which penetrate to that level of consciousness on which a world of experience is constituted prior to being analysed" (1973, p. xi, 33). The notion

¹ In contextualist explanations, nations occur wherever there is a modern state and significant urbanization (Hans Kohn and George Schöppflin), a standardized, centralized culture as a result of economic, political, and social development (Ernest Gellner), a social milieu where certain classes and regions are predominant (Peter Sugar), or recruitment campaigns and migration towards the cities (Eugene Weber). Instrumentalists pin nations down to state institutions (Anthony Giddens and Charles Tilly), means of mass communication (Karl Deutsch, Louis L. Snyder, and Benedict Anderson), the public education system (Snyder, Carlton Hayes, Eugene Weber, and Eric Hobsbawm), or mass printing industry (Hayes and Anderson).

that such basic rhetorical devices structure our representations of reality indicates a “cultural deixis”, an infrequent term (and one that usually lacks an explicit definition) for the complex processes of positioning oneself as to culturally-defined in-groups and out-groups, of acquiring a sense of place and time for one’s community, or of understanding the particularities of one’s community by comparison with others. Cultural deixis is rhetorically inflected and these inflections result in competing versions of the national self-image. They are deictic modulations which occur on the basis of alternative generative patterns, the indexical master tropes. Indexical master tropes could be described as deep structuring processes that configure our representations of the collective self and of its cultural other(s). In the case of marginalized countries like Romania, which have been subjected to a damaging process of othering by both the Western and the Soviet gaze, the various deictic schemata are meant to comfort the hurt national ego and flex nationalistic muscles. After the fall of communism, the country was once again free to revisit the alternative and competing genealogies of nationalism in order to restore its damaged identity. In the process of exemplifying such first aid maneuvers, I will try to demonstrate that cultural deixis is more complicated than the orthodox linguistic models of indexicality and that cultural trauma complicates it even more.

Traditionally, deixis is described by means of “egocentric particulars” (Bertrand Russell). These are indicators of the special character or position of the speaker and of the speaking situation (Ruthrof, 2009, p. 22). All utterances are commonly believed to naturally place the speaking subjects at the center or inner circle of their here-and-now universe, looking out at other persons or other spaces and times. These egocentric and naturalistic assumptions have been questioned by William F. Hanks (1990) and proven particularly inadequate especially for understanding (post-traumatic) cultural deixis, which is neither entirely “ego-”, nor “-centric”. Hanks proposes that deixis is culturally constructed, that it is based on a dialogic interaction of more than the speaker’s singular viewpoint, and that this interaction between several perspectives is loaded as a result of an asymmetric distribution of “cultural capital” between them (1990, p. 7, 15 and *passim*). Mihaela Irimia is similarly sophisticated in describing the complications of this “axiologically loaded” process:

Encountering the Other [is] an eye-opening experience producing an increased awareness of doubleness in oneself. . . . Cultural deixis, if properly nuanced, can teach us the “here” and the “there”, can become interchangeable from where we are, as can the “I” and the “you” involved in cultural assessments. It is this dynamics that turns nature into nurture and provides us with the food of cultural identity. (2012, p. 32, 39)

I embrace the problematization of cultural deixis undertaken by Hanks and Irimia and in the remainder of my paper I will illustrate such complications in the context of marginalized nations like Romania. These countries have been attempting to reconstruct their cultural self under symbolic duress by employing the rhetorical schemata of indexical master tropes in order to reposition themselves in relation to cultural others.

1. Antagonistic indexicality. Imagining the nation by antithesis

Though the Burke-White model of tropical representations of reality is extremely useful, I find that the particular tropes with which they work are only partly adequate to describe the mechanics of national identity construction. Consequently, I am proposing an alternative four-fold typology of indexical master tropes, which preserves metaphor and irony, but replaces metonymy and synecdoche with antithesis and simile.

In fact, I am proposing that antithesis and simile are the most frequent indexical master tropes for the nationalist imagination, as they are more intuitive and closer to our experiential perceptions (Ștefănescu, 2013a, p. 170-9 and 2016, p. 107-22). This is also François Hartog's observation when he talks of inversion and analogy as the major "figures" or "schemata" in the discursive construction of self/other images by Herodotus (1988, p. 210 and *passim*). I think Hartog's observations have universal currency and their applicability goes beyond the study of antiquity. For instance, historian Lucian Boia also claims that, in their recent past, as a result of having been disparagingly othered by the West (and, I would add, also forcibly assimilated by Soviet communism), Romanians could not help but react to these cultural injuries in one of two ways: either by an autochthonist inflation of their irreducible difference or by a desperate show of sameness with the rest of Europe, through which they hoped to demonstrate that they share the continent's cultural values, ideas, and traditions (Boia, 2000, p. 281).

Antithesis, or the "juxtaposition of contrasting words or ideas" (apud Howard, 2010, p. 39), is a product of the antagonistic imagination and seems to be the most conflictual indexical master trope—and the most common. Echoing Andrew Linklater (*The Transformation of Political Community*), Vivienne Jabri finds that "[w]hat we witness today is the prevalence of war and the politics of antagonism" (2007, p. 7; cf. also 1996, p. 120 and *passim*) in international politics. Antithesis describes the national self as contrary to a designated cultural other—an inversion in Hartog's imagological lexicon—and magnifies the differences between one's own and other nations. This was explained by social psychologists as "ingroup-favouring", a self-categorization through the maximization of differences from outgroups (Tajfel, 1982, p. 24). This observation was phrased in his inimitably ironic way by Hungarian-British author George Mikes:

...in England everything is the other way round. On Sundays on the Continent even the poorest person puts on his best suit, tries to look respectable, and at the same time the life of the country becomes gay and cheerful; in England even the richest peer or motor-manufacturer dresses in some peculiar rags, does not shave, and the country becomes dull and dreary. On the Continent there is one topic which should be avoided - the weather; in England, if you do not repeat the phrase 'Lovely day, isn't it?' at least two hundred times a day, you are considered a bit dull... On the Continent almost every nation whether little or great has openly declared at one time or an-

other that it is superior to all other nations; the English fight heroic wars to combat these dangerous ideas without ever mentioning which is *really* the most superior race in the world. . . . Many continentals think life is a game; the English think cricket is a game. (1946)

Antithesis, then, works through opposition between the national self and its adversarial other. It operates hyperbolic augmentations and reductions of the compared groups making them look either exceptionally good or exceptionally bad, and disregarding anything they might hold in common. The rhetorical function of antithetical nationalism is to mobilize the nation, to move it (*movere*) to react against inferior or dangerous cultural alterities by means of passionate appeals (*pathos*) and tragic-heroic action-driven stories (Ștefănescu, 2013c, p. 130-3, 161).

The use of antithesis has a lengthy tradition in Romanian culture as well. But it was especially in the nineteenth century, as Romania was fighting for political union and independence from foreign oppression, that the radical (often reactionary) autochthonism of cultural personalities like Mihai Eminescu, Bogdan Petriceicu Hasdeu, or Nicolae Bălcescu became dominant and it was canonized in the first half of the twentieth century (Boia, 2000, p. 65 and passim). In its early days, after WWII, Soviet-imposed communism briefly interrupted the antithetical nationalist tradition. In the new reigning ideology, class rather than ethnicity was the only accepted criterion for radical exclusionism. As a result, historical personalities in Romania's revised hall of nationalist fame were included or removed depending on their attitude toward the exploited classes—and the Russians (Boia, 2000, p. 215). But as Romania started pulling away from Moscow's hegemony after the withdrawal of the Red Army in 1958, the old antagonistic scheme of national identification by antithetical inversion was recycled by national-communist propaganda. Domestic communist leaders set the pace for a renewed nationalist discourse which rediscovered Bălcescu and Eminescu and reinscribed ethnicity as a validating criterion (Boia, 2000, p. 218 and passim). Official propagandists and historians, literary mercenaries like those grouped around the weekly magazine *Săptămîna*, the "protochronists", that is, the cultural elites that were sanctioned by the communist power, all joined in overstating the inherent antagonism of such national self-images through a discourse of ethnic hatred and exclusion.

Sailing serenely across different historical contexts, antithetic nationalism was then rediscovered in Romania after 1989 as a reaction to the nation's precipitated efforts to be assimilated into Euro-Atlantic institutions. Early in the 1990s, former communist apparatchiks and secret police officers rode that wave by infiltrating political and civic organizations like Vatra românească, Greater Romania, and the National Salvation Front and by rejuvenating the traditional exclusionary tactics of extremist national assertion. This fostered a series of fierce controversies such as the "alternative history textbooks scandal" (Boia, 2000, p. 19-24), the polemic occasioned by an issue of the *Dilema* (no. 265 of 1998) cultural weekly which was directed against the quasi-religious cult of the "national poet" Eminescu, the debate over the condemnation of the *Gândirea* interwar personalities for anti-Semitism and

fascist sympathies, etc. Like most of the other postcommunist nations, post-1989 Romanians were eager to retrace their confiscated traditions and reconsider their national destiny. This new moment of national reconstruction mostly replicated the older pre- and interwar debates on the making of modern Romania together with the attending radical over-simplifications (Ornea, 1980, p. 307 and passim, Hitchins, 1994, p. 55 and passim). The usual quarrel between the traditionalists and the Westernizers was repeatedly revisited. The polemic in the leading cultural magazines *Revista 22*, *Dilema*, and *Contrapunct* between Westernizer Gabriel Andreescu and anti-Westernizer Octavian Paler, who was joined by the more moderate Alexandru Paleologu (cf. Andreescu 1996), epitomizes this reductive antagonism. While Andreescu addresses the problem of Moldova and Transylvania in clearly liberal institutionalist fashion and repudiates the ethno-culturalist positions (1996, p. 20-21 and passim), Paler invokes a war between nationalists and the “Europeans” and describes the latter as “servile” to the West since they “understand perfectly what is going on in Strasbourg, but are incapable of seeing what is going on in Romania” (qtd. in Andreescu, 1996, p. 38). Later, as Romania joined its ranks, the European Union itself came to be presented as an alien colonial antagonist by members of the political and intellectual elites, on a par with Soviet communism (Ștefănescu, 2014, p. 363).

Complications. When Lucian Boia (2000, p. 257) proposes his mutual dependency theory whereby Romanian historiography operated under the compulsion to merely oppose Hungarian accounts of the region’s past it becomes clear that even the simplistic oppositions of antithetical nationalist discourse raise some problems. In his imagological analysis, François Hartog describes inversion (“anti-sameness”) as a process of cultural representation by which the other is really translated into the same, except that it is now reversed: “it is no longer a matter of *a* and *b*, simply of *a* and the converse of *a*”. Hartog sees it as a “heuristic principle” whereby an otherwise opaque difference is translated into a mere reversal of the familiar terms in which the cultural self is imagined (1988, p. 213-4). It appears, then, that self and other are locked in this confrontation which turns their conflict zone into a common ground and makes them dependent on one another. Indeed, certain rhetorical definitions of antithesis already suggest the insidious presence of similarity and parallelism at the heart of oppositions (Baldick, 2001, p. 14), which makes possible the mutual dependency of cultural opposites.

Reversed exceptionalism is another complication in the antithetical self-imaging of traumatized cultures. Usually, antithetical nationalism presents the collective self as superior to its cultural other, but distressed cultural identities often display a self-loathing complex. As a result, one’s own nation is viewed in disparaging terms and turned into an exemplary victim. The identitarian anxiety of inter-war Romanian writers like Tristan Tzara, Eugen Ionescu, or Emil Cioran was so dire that they directed their sarcasm against their own culture in a twisted effort to singularize their

nation through its defects.² During communism, a similar feeling of guilt and shame led to a wave of self-disparaging jokes. One such joke proclaimed: “Romania is the most beautiful country in the world—too bad it had to be populated by the Romanians. . .” This is no more than a cloaked or reversed exceptionalism: the nation is still perceived as exceptional, but in a negative way. It is an indication of hurt national pride and a tragic attempt at a twisted form of self-assertion. Even after the fall of communism, the self-loathing was still there. Echoing Cioran, Horia-Roman Patapievi, one of the most spectacular literary debutants in the early 1990s, derided the exceptionalist odes to Romanian heritage. Interestingly, though, in his sarcasm Patapievi employs precisely the rhetorical tactics of antithetical nationalism in order to replace positive with negative exceptionalism:

To be a Romanian did not pose for me any problem of choice: it was an ineluctable destiny. A dilect one, no doubt, for the optimistic, flattering ontology edified by Mircea Vulcănescu and Constantin Noica... seemed to create a right. Romanianness, therefore, was instituted as a kind of privilege, a kind of baptism through birth, even preceding birth. To be a Romanian meant to be chosen. No doubt, you have been able to recognize this as the ethnic theory of the stamped spermatozoon. (1995, p. 84)

2. Analogical Indexicality. Imagining the Nation by Simile

Although conflictual antithetical representations seem like the most popular choice for all nationalist discourse, it must be noted that there are three other rhetorical moves to construct national identity which appear to be less or even entirely non-adversarial. One such indexical master trope that represents the self-other relationship in a non-conflictual manner is grounded in sameness. *Simile*, a product of the analogical imagination, has traditionally constituted the alternative rhetorical strategy to antithetical identification. Analogy was, alongside inversion, a major imagological device since ancient Greek historiography according to François Hartog (1988, p. 212-30). Representing self and other through similarities, rather than irreconcilable differences, analogical nationalism employs our reasonability—whether we resort to Aristotelian *logos* or to Habermasian communicative rationality (Habermas 1998)—in order to develop a sense of compatibility with the other(s) and a common ground that facilitates cohabitation and negotiated solutions. Antithetical and analogical nationalists may be said to illustrate the opposing categories of “sharpeners” and “levelers” in the cognitive typology of G. S. Klein or those of “field-dependence” and “field-independence” in H. A. Witkin’s taxonomy (Ko-

² Before leaving Romania for good, Eugen Ionescu wrote a devastating pamphlet against domestic culture called *No*. Tristan Tzara, the notorious pen-name taken by Jewish-Romanian avant-gardist Samuel Rosenstock was a transliteration of the Romanian phrase *trist în țară* (“sad in [my] country”). While still in Romania, Emil Cioran published two volumes of vituperations against his own country: *On the Heights of Despair* (*Pe culmile disperării*, 1934) and *Romania’s Transfiguration* (*Schimbarea la față a României*, 1939).

zhevnikov, 2007, p. 465 and passim). Critical discourse analysts also speak of two alternative manners of constructing national identity through “assimilation” and “dissimilation” (Wodak, de Cillia, Reisigl & Liebhart, 2009, p. 33 and passim). The rhetorical function of analogical nationalism is to enlighten and emancipate the nation (*docere*), to instill reasonability towards cultural alterity, and to create a sense of broad homogeneity (universalism). It usually employs rational appeals to order and consensus (*logos*) which it illustrated by inductive examples and moralizing fables (Ștefănescu, 2013c, p. 123-30, 161-2).

Using simile to create an analogical relationship between national self and cultural other that focuses on sameness is a particularly handy device for the nationalist discourse of subaltern cultures attempting to convince the (Western) world of their legitimacy as independent and equal nations.³ From 1780 to the revolutionary 1840s and later in the century, the virulent adversarial romantic images of the Romanian nation were complemented by a liberal and civic nationalism fed by Enlightenment universalism (Borbély, 2008). In the twentieth century, literary personality Eugen Lovinescu was an exemplary analogic nationalist. In his *History of Modern Romanian Civilization* (1924-1926) Lovinescu proposes the theory of “synchronism”, an elaboration on the mechanics of simile according to which the mere imitation of Western civilization would bring uniformity and create a viable society in Romania. Lovinescu is but one of several liberal-minded intellectuals in interwar Romania, such as Ion G. Duca, Ștefan Zeletin or Camil Petrescu, who were all driven to universalism by their analogical imagination.

Romanian communism tried to destroy the tradition and continuity of liberal nationalist thought. As it turned from its early internationalist jargon to national-communism, the self-imaging process dictated by communist propaganda incorporated the radical antagonistic vision of interwar antithetic nationalism. The decades of indoctrination made it difficult for more liberal variants of nationalism to reemerge in the public space after the fall of communism. There have been, however, a few if unrelated voices like those of anti-communist dissident Gabriel Andreescu, the stay-behind literary theorist Adrian Marino, self-exiled cultural historian Virgil Nemoianu, or the younger politologist-turned-politician Cristian Preda who promoted simile-based reconstructions of a liberal nation through the emulation of Western models.

Complications. In traumatized cultures such as the Romanian, simile is by its nature inseparable from dissimilarity. As a literary/rhetorical device it is generally described as “an explicit comparison between two different things, actions, or feelings, using the words ‘as’ or ‘like’” (Baldick, 2001, p. 237). In fact, it can be argued that simile is only possible *because* the objects compared are different and that, in

³ In its *Proclamation of Independence*, the Greek National Assembly of 1822 justified its nationalist war against the Ottoman oppressor by an appeal to the “rights which the civilized people of Europe, our neighbors, enjoy today” and by the desire “to assimilate ourselves to the rest of the Christians in Europe, our brethren” (Kohn, 1955, p. 116-7).

spite of its effort to dissipate or hide the disparity, simile reinforces it. Let us remember that Hartog declares analogical collective image construction to be a mechanism whose purpose is to negotiate discrepancy and make otherness more accessible to our understanding.

With a historically traumatized nation like Romania, it is only because the national self was constantly othered by the West that it desperately needs to present itself as not unlike that of occidental nations (Boia, 2000, p. 281). And yet, although it is presumed to be the same, there is an obvious asymmetry of sameness in the discourse situation: the Western listener still has to be persuaded that the two cultures are the same against a *habitus* wherein the Eastern speaker's culture is commonly perceived as inferior. Western modernity has been constructed, among other things, through the relegation of East European cultures to a primitive and underdeveloped status (cf. Larry Wolff, 1994 and Maria Todorova, 1997). Such cultures were gradually made to internalize that perception and were consequently doomed to picture themselves from an alter-centric perspective, rather than an ego-centric one, in an endless process of mimicking the West. Postcommunist countries are pushed into a mimicry of the Western stance with the perpetual awareness that they are just that, sham replicas of an original (a deictic *origo*) that lies elsewhere.

As a result, Romania's liberal-analogical nationalism acquires a particular flavor. In subaltern and marginalized cultures, the claims to sameness and kinship come from a defensive attitude against inimical aliens, which changes dramatically the nature and function of liberal discourses. Alexandru George argues that Romanian attempts at Western models of liberalism are typical of oppressed and "proletarian" peoples like the Italian, the Poles, the Hungarians, the Greeks, the Jews, the Serbs, the Bulgarians etc. In the "classical" countries which experienced incipient liberalism, the movement had no national connotation, it was entirely "vertical" (class conscious, let us call it), whereas in these other parts of the world revolutionarism was mostly "horizontal", it mobilized all social layers to fight against the foreigners and achieve national definition (Mungiu-Pippidi, 1998, p. 47). In such contexts, then, analogical liberalism was not so much adopted as adapted, transfigured, and made to serve different purposes through a process of Calibanization.

The garden varieties of nationalist rhetoric, based on antithesis and simile, are not as straightforward as they may seem in the case of traumatized cultures. Antithesis clamors difference just as it ushers similarity, while simile protests a sameness that is forever deferred by the very othering which made simile a necessary rhetorical strategy in the first place. The twin practices of exceptionalism and mimicry complicate identity-formation practices by operating simultaneously on sameness and difference and by setting up a perplexing relationship between self and other in traumatized cultures.

3. Harmonious Indexicality. Imagining the Nation by Metaphor

The forging of national images of such cultures is tortuous not only as a result of the complications of the seemingly simple rhetorical schemata of antithesis and simile, but also because of the co-presence of two other indexical master tropes, which are overtly complicated and whose logic is counter-intuitive: metaphor and irony. *Metaphor* performs an impenetrable symbolic function that Blake once called “double vision”. It prefigures the quintessential and harmonious unity of self and other—as of most opposites we can think of—before they are even separated in our mind. Because of the counter-intuitive and counter-experiential nature of metaphoric representations, the true nature of metaphor has constantly been misrepresented since Aristotle, the originator of the thesis according to which a metaphor is merely a clipped simile (*Rhetoric* III, 1406b). Romantic theories of symbol and metaphor have attempted to change the old Aristotelian understanding of metaphor, yet the bi-millenary resilience of this misrepresentation of metaphor in the community of philosophers and scientists (even linguists like R. Jakobson) is nothing short of astounding. Even when they propose more complicated explanatory schemes like possible worlds semantics, analysts keep conflating metaphor and simile (cf. Hintikka & Sandu, 1994, p. 156-60 and *passim*).

Luckily, literary scholars are trained to spot the obvious differences between a simile and a genuine, live metaphor. Frank Kermode’s famous study of the “romantic image” points to its essentially metaphoric attributes: isolation and autonomous individuality, as well as an irrational monism by virtue of which motif and expression, matter and form, body and soul become indistinguishable from one another (1961, p. 21, 43-8). With similar acumen, Christine Brooke-Rose has described metaphor as a union of two different things:

The comparison merely states that A is like B, never that A is B. In metaphor B can replace A altogether, leaving us to guess it, or it can be linked to A by an enormous variety of complex grammatical and syntactical means of expression. . . . Metaphor, in this study, is any replacement of one word by another, or any identification of one thing, concept or person with any other. (1958, p. 9, 14, 23-4)

Likewise, Northrop Frye sees (ecstatic) metaphor as a mode of representation that arises from a special existential mode wherein self and other become identical:

...in a state of society in which a split between a perceiving subject and a perceived object is not yet habitual, and what it does in that context is to open up a channel or current of energy between human and natural worlds. . . . The essential point here is that literary metaphor, which is purely hypothetical, grows out of an existential type of metaphor, as we might call it, where a subject does identify himself with something not himself, in an experience which has no further need for language. . . . (1990, p. 111, 118, 226)

In his turn, Paul de Man points at the consubstantiality of manner and substance in the metaphoric, fragmentary structure of the Romantic idiom and he insists that metaphor expresses one single experience, rather than link two separate experiences as does analogy (1984, p. 4).

Symbolic imagination employs the master trope of metaphor in order to create images of the nation which focus on its detached phenomenological identity. This indexical mechanism represents self and other as indistinguishable in a counter-intuitive relation which might be called identity-as-oneness. The rhetorical function of metaphoric nationalism is to invite the listener to join the speaker in an identification with the intuitive essence of the nation, to share the pleasure (*delectare*) of harmonious oneness which is at once private and communal, to become oblivious of differences and strife, and to conflate national self and cultural other by means of mellow empathetic appeals (Quintilian's gentler and conciliatory *ethos* in *Institutes of Oratory* VI.2.9-19), epideictic tributes, and idyllic/lyrical textual modalities (Ștefănescu, 2013c, p. 133-8, 160-1). Metaphoric nationalist discourse seeks harmonious oneness not only among the elements that compose the nation, but also between the nation and the world at large in a universe where difference and alterity have all but ceased being represented to the mind.

Obscuring cultural difference and opposition through metaphoric oblivion is a rhetorical strategy whereby a traumatized Romanian identity can find solace in an imaginary universe devoid of strife and free from the confrontation with inimical others. Geographer George Vâlsan provides a telling example of this defensive mechanism for representing the nation. In 1919, a year after Romania finally became reunited with Transylvania, in his inaugural open lecture on geography at the recently Romanianized University of Cluj, Vâlsan posits an ancestral "sense of place" that precedes and molds the concept of fatherland. He illustrates this with *moșie*, a word derived from *moș*, meaning "old man", "grandfather" or "forefather" and designating a traditionally inherited land:

The Romanian does not say: 'I fight for my people', he says: 'I fight for my country, for my *moșie*. And wisely so, for he does not fight simply for this great agglomeration of contemporaries, but also for his land, - this land that our peasant cherishes so, - and for his forefathers [*moși*] which this land preserves. What a fine word *moșie*! Evidently it comes from *moși*, but it still refers to land. It joins these elements into one... And it is so right that the notion of land in its diverse geographic fashions should be part of the obscure national conscience of the peasant!... Nature is endowed with a soul, and that soul is ours. (Chimet, 1992, p. 29)

Vâlsan takes metaphoric perception to conflate several distinctions into this pan-harmonious word, *moșie*. His chosen metaphor harmonizes-into-one the land and its people, private property and common territory, nature and consciousness, the universal soul and the Romanian soul.

The interbellum was an age of cultural wars over the nature and the territory of the nation, which had doubled as a result of the 1918 Union, scandalizing the contending neighbors. Against their accusations, some Romanian nationalists found rhetorical shelter in the safe universe provided by isolated words or syntagms. Philosopher and poet Lucian Blaga believed this to be an echo of the millennial survival skills developed by Romanians—a strategic retreat from the open planes into the mountainous forests paired with a withdrawal from or “boycott” of, history (Ștefănescu, 2015, p. 114). In his 1936 philosophical essay, *Spațiul mioritic*, he proposed that the “stylistic matrix” of the national spirit was metaphorically captured by the word *plai*, the image of a rolling alternation of hills and valleys, which embodied Romanians’ vacillation between and harmonization of, extremes. A similar alchemy of the national soul was conjured a few years later by philosopher Mircea Vulcănescu, who dwells on a word like *întotdeauna* (meaning “always”, but literally reading “in-all-as-one”), which he claims is related to the Greek *en kai pan*, in order to illustrate the harmonious quality of the Romanian soul. Another interwar young philosopher who took up Blaga’s model was Constantin Noica, who, especially in his later works *Rostirea filozofică românească* (1970), *Creație și frumos în rostirea românească* (1973), and *Cuvînt împreună despre rostirea românească* (1987), picked out exemplary words like *întru* (“towards” and “[with]in”), *rost* (“purpose”, “order”, “meaning”, “speech”) or *fire* (“nature” or “character”) to illustrate the metaphysical depth of the national spirit. At the time, Noica was also feeling his national identity under siege from both Soviet and capitalist modernization and thus resorted to the rhetorical strategy of metaphoric recoil from a confrontational world. His lyricization of philosophical nationalism is a defensive strategy whereby he hoped to harmoniously resolve the stressful relations with communism and cultural alterities. In a cruel historical twist, the national-communist propaganda cunningly leached off the very discourse of metaphoric nationalism and worked its parasitical way into the traditional emblems of the nation: the family (the mother country and her sons, the paternal figure of the leader), the language which encapsulates the spirit of the nation, the country’s symbolic geography which harmonizes different climates and relief forms, etc.

On occasion, the metaphoric nationalist discourse crosses into the early post-communist years. Noica’s disciple, Gabriel Liiceanu, evoked in lyrical-symbolic terms the portrait of King Michael, deposed by the communist regime in 1947, on his first brief return to Romania in 1992. In a short if emotionally intense essay, *De ce regi?* (“Wherefore Kings?”), Liiceanu writes that:

The King is the head of an entire people turned towards the sky, our whole being brought together at an elevated point. When a people is deprived of its rightful sovereign, it is bereft of its head turned towards heavens. (1992)

4. Antinomic Indexicality. Imagining the Nation by Irony

Irony is the second counter-intuitive master trope through which nationalist discourse can construct its cultural deixis. As an indexical device, irony proves just as confounding as metaphor as it plays cultural self against its alter only to tease us with their paradoxical identity (*coincidentia oppositorum*). In order to understand its non-conflictual potential, irony must be distinguished from sarcasm and mockery, which are forms of rhetorical violence more suited to the quarrelsome antithetical nationalism. By contrast, irony is a species of equivocation, whereby the contradictory, paradoxical nature of a situation is articulated through a plurivocal, multiperspectival discourse which is “dialogic” in both a Socratic and a Bakhtinian sense. Both Hayden White (1973, p. 37) and Linda Hutcheon (1995, p. 11 and *passim*) caution us against taking irony to be the devious replacement of one meaning by another, and encourage us instead to see in it the coexistence of conflicting or incompatible meanings, of irreconcilable perspectives in one and the same discursive formula. Claire Colebrook also offers an eloquent argument for distinguishing between the inherent ambiguity of philosophical irony and the banal form of sarcastic univocality:

Already, then, there is a difference between Socratic irony in the Platonic dialogues and a merely rhetorical irony. We can imagine a banal everyday irony where we said to a driver who turned out in front of us: ‘Well, that was *clever!*’ where clever clearly means stupid or unthinking. We are substituting one word for another, its opposite or contrary. But Socrates’ irony is not just a substitute of one word for another. Even at its clearest, he uses irony, not to say something else or opposite, but to question the use of a concept. He does not necessarily offer another or clearly recognisable opposed meaning. (2004, p. 25)

Irony is a profoundly paradoxical or “aporetic”, dialectical mode by which the contraries of an antithesis become coincidental without conciliation. Kenneth Burke describes irony as a superior form of self-knowledge that assists the dialectical understanding of history as a relationship between self and other:

True irony, however, irony that really does justify the attribute of “humility,” is not “superior” to the enemy... True irony, humble irony, is based upon a sense of fundamental kinship with the enemy, as one *needs* him, is *indebted* to him, is not merely outside him as an observer but contains him *within* being consubstantial with him. (1969, p. 514)

The rhetorical function of this antinomic nationalism is to vex everybody out of their dogmatic certainties with the troubling notion of a coincidence between national self and cultural other. Ironic nationalism wields paradoxes, oxymorons, and witicism in order to force the more hasty and self-assured nationalists to meditate on their superficial or inadequate dismissal of alterity. Its appeal is to the profound self-probing of the *nous* by aporetic (*aporetikós*) arguments and dilemmas in order to elicit the problematizing and the self-questioning (*rogare*) of one’s national identity.

This produces parodic dramatizations of self/other encounters, shocking reversals, and unexpected twists, it diffuses the nationalist tension with a quick humor that is reminiscent of the ancient *paradoxi* and *ieron*-like characters or with the impenetrability of oracular and esoteric dicta (Ștefănescu, 2013c, p. 138-46, 162-4).

Irony can be another defensive strategy in the face of a daunting antagonist which it aims to disarm without direct opposition. Through an unexpected course of action or attitude, the opposite of what common sense dictates, one nevertheless procures the desired result. It is not surprising that historians of a nation which was for so long besieged by various indomitable empires and aggressors developed an ironic perspective on the inexplicable success of this nation to survive in spite of centuries of military assaults. Vlad Georgescu suggests there is a so-called “theory of capitulations” in Romanian historiography which claims that Romanian voivodes and boyars allegedly chose to ensure the survival and relative autonomy of their principalities precisely by accepting or even volunteering vassalage to the Ottoman Porte, rather than by trying to directly confront it (qtd. in Caragea, 2004, p. 19 and passim). The stratagem was to identify the auspicious moments when the enemy felt less secure and to propose an advantageous conditional capitulation to the relieved aggressor. Evacuation was another perplexing strategy of Romanian resistance against sweeping migrations and empires. It amounted to scorching the lands and the crops, poisoning the wells and the springs, burning down the homesteads, and retreating into the central region of mountains and forests to discourage the advancing enemies who came to realize there was nothing to be gained from a now desolate territory. In short, one secured a psychological victory by battering oneself. Later on, in the years that followed the end of WWII, anticommunist resistance fighters would employ this strategy of using the woody mountains for a guerilla fight which surprisingly lasted until the mid-1960s. When even that became impossible, certain members of the intellectual elites switched to a less heroic, yet equally surreptitious defense whereby they indirectly and covertly opposed communist tyranny by withdrawing into the immaterial life of uncontaminated spiritual and aesthetic values.

Letiția Guran has scanned this phenomenon known in Eastern Europe as the “resistance through aesthetics/(high) culture” which, if we are to take the word of important public intellectuals like V. Havel or A. Michnik, represented an alternative or counter-discourse to communist propaganda (Guran, 2010, p. 55-60 and passim; cf. also Marino, 1996, and Martin, 2002). This “utopian” resistance was built on the ironic gesture of seemingly conceding victory to the communist oppressor while in fact insidiously undermining the process of indoctrination and destruction of cultural traditions. According to Guran, whose view I endorse, Constantin Noica best epitomized in communist Romania this philosophy of withdrawing from history and into the world of classical, eternal values. Noica, who became a widely respected public intellectual while never abandoning his life as a self-marginalized recluse, was a master of devious and ironic resistance by converting his palpable defeats into spiritual victories (Guran, 2010, p. 67-9, Ștefănescu, 2013b, p. 11-9). His provincial abode, a place of self-exile, became an alternative cultural center, a lay, non-

communist Mecca of philosophy for aspiring intellectuals. Noica wrote compulsively on Romanianness as he suffered a double cultural trauma from both communist alienation and lack of recognition from a West which he felt equally kindred to and neglected by—a “disregarded brother” (1993, p. 10). Though indebted to the metaphoric nationalist idioms of Blaga and Vulcănescu, Noica’s treatment of language as a symbol of the nation was more than once modulated by the master trope of irony. In the context of Romania’s cultural war against Hungarian historiography over the right to and precedence in, Transylvania (Boia, 2010, p. 257), Noica chose to discuss the word *hotar* (“border”) in an unexpected manner:

This word, *hotar*, so encoded into our language, is nevertheless taken from another language, Hungarian. Today, when we are already settled in the Latinity of our language, since no one is left to deny it, we should admit - whatever our past - to a good mental and affective contact with cohabiting nationalities.

It is only fitting to tell and show them [*i.e.*, *the Hungarians*), with brotherly gratitude, what we have made of their words; which is something entirely different at times. With *hotar* our speculations were so profound that we can now try to distinguish and separate the devil’s part in things from that of man. (1996, p. 206)

The statement is ironic on multiple planes. Hinting at a delicate territorial controversy with neighboring Hungary, now a communist sister nation, Noica picks up the word for territorial separation and reverses it into a symbol of spiritual communion, a *coincidentia oppositorum* of cultural self and arch-inimical other. National identity emerges mysteriously from this contradictory identification—an easily recognizable Hegelian dialectic. The tension is not dissipated—it is incorporated. The text still preserves the strain of the traditional ethnic differend (“whatever our past”) and Noica reiterates it just as he pretends to leave it behind, when he rather esoterically mentions the devil and speaks of the conceptual and moral borderlines, or when he indirectly suggests that Romanians made better use of the term than Hungarians themselves. Still, the typical frustration of a Romanian in front of a one-time imperial culture and a more refined civilization is resolved not by flaunting ethnic purity or earlier ancestry, but, shockingly, by accepting the cultural *mestizaje* and embracing linguistic otherness.

Ironic images of the nation, which generate critical distance from imagological stereotypes, have a rather lengthy tradition that goes back to the first half of the nineteenth century in Romania (Drace-Francis, 2013, p. 117, 129-30). However, they are rather sparse in recent history, especially after 1989, when the reconstruction of national identity, a pressing and troubling matter, was debated mostly with antagonistic inflammation. Perhaps the one voice that merits a special mention is the late Luca Pițu, a master of postmodern *witz*, whose parodic idiom deconstructs nationalist hagiography. His tactic resides in the ironic undermining of Romanian exceptionalism whose *topoi* Pițu enjoys to push to their absurd conclusions. He

subverts the self-congratulatory cliché regarding the matrix-space of Romanian identity (Blaga's "*spațiul mioritic*", which I have addressed in the section on metaphoric nationalism) and reinscribes it as "*spațiul miosecuritic*", a portmanteau word combining the name of a revered Romanian mythical ballad, *Miorița* and *Securitate*, the dreaded name of the communist secret police. Pițu is similarly irreverent to geo-cultural symbols: the Prut (a river that was the border between Romania and the USSR, dividing the country from an amputated and much lamented portion of Moldova, now a separate state) is renamed "*rîul pruturos*" (from *puturos*, meaning "stinking") and the Danube Delta is referred to as the *cunus et culus Europae*, i.e., "Europe's cone and ass" (1995, p. 142). In his letter to an occidental friend, an imagological reference to Malraux's *La tentation de l'occident* and to the exchange of letters between Noica and Cioran, Pițu claims to belong to *l'ubunivers dadanubien* (1995, p. 206). His ironic discourse on the nation invites the readers to constantly rethink their identitarian certainty and pride.

Behind the subtleties and witticism in Noica's or Pițu's ironic images of the nation, one senses the bitterness of a thwarted identity, the unmistakable signs of cultural trauma. Ironic nationalism in postcommunist countries like Romania is never a relaxed meditation on the complexities of national identity, but rather a strategy of distress, a compensating move in the face of historical duress.

Concluding remarks: reassessing nationalism's potential for conflict

A nation's identity is a plurivalent and unsettled indexical relation between several images of the collective self and of cultural others. In the case of insecure nations that struggle to emerge from cultural traumas it becomes even clearer that the national self is caught in an inevitably unstable cultural deixis. My purpose here has been to illustrate this versatility of nationalist discourse as it is inflected by the four indexical master tropes which prefigure cultural representations of self and other, as well as to suggest the unequal potential for conflict of these four different versions of national identity. Although the examples I have provided here for the four discursive templates and for their genealogy come from the modern and recent history of Romania, I am confident that this explanatory scheme works for other postcommunist European cultures with a history of identity trauma. Naturally, in these other East European contexts, the frequency and dominance of each master trope in the competing versions of national (re)construction will vary according to the particulars of each country's historical situation.

I have suggested four discursive principles that organize a nation's cultural deixis: on the one hand, there are the intuitive master tropes of antithesis and simile (a choice that is corroborated by the analytical categories proposed by François Hartog or Ruth Wodak et al.), on the other, there are the counterintuitive master tropes of metaphor and irony, already suggested by Kenneth Burke and Hayden White. Of the four, antithesis is the only one with an overt potential for conflict which comes from the antagonistic structure of representations of the nation as an inverted image of its

cultural other(s). Unfortunately, this is the most frequented mode of conceiving one's national identity, which explains why critics of nationalism have a tendency to reduce all the different forms of nationalism to this type of exclusionary discourse, especially in its most exaggerated forms. It is true that, in certain critical situations or in circumstances where patriotic passions get out of hand, it is rather easy to cross the line into excessive or extremist forms of nationalism or even past those, into chauvinism, racism, and xenophobia. But it does not follow with necessity that antithetical nationalism's potential for conflict will lead to symbolic or physical violence, just as, for instance, oppositions of temperament or in intellectual and sporting competitions do not, of their own nature, translate into verbal or physical abuse. The most common varieties of antithetical nationalism exacerbate differences in order to singularize the nation, to provide exceptionalist descriptions of one's nation and of its supposed mission. In traumatized cultures like Romania, however, one notices an inflation of reverse exceptionalism and self-loathing/self-hatred whereby the nation is singled out by its negative traits or by its unparalleled catastrophic fate and consummate lack of success.

What is notable—and yet remains largely unnoticed—is that all other master tropes employed in the discursive construction of national identity are less prone to conflictual representations of the nation, if at all. Simile minimizes irreconcilable differences and insists on what the nation shares in common with other cultures as members of a super-ingroup or a higher-level community (e.g., Europeaness, Christianity etc.). Although Christian brotherhood was commonly invoked to the Western courts by Romanian princes in their joint fight against the Ottoman threat, it was especially in the wake of the Enlightenment that modernizing cultural elites in Romania became particularly amenable to such analogical portraits of the country which focused on affinities with the rest of the civilized (Western) world. As an indexical master trope for national self-imaging, metaphor also obnubilates or assimilates beyond recognition cultural alterities by a process of identity harmonization, wherein a symbolic part of the nation contains the whole and enables the genial integration of otherness or blending into the universe as a whole. In such a lyrical and empathetic mode, difference and alterity all but cease being represented to the mind and conflict is almost entirely absent. Irony is yet another form of cultural deixis in nationalist discourse which curbs the confrontational furor we tend to associate with nationalism. By presenting the self-other relation in a paradoxical or aporetic manner, the counterintuitive master trope of irony thwarts any war-like inclinations as it vexingly suggests that, in their very opposition—indeed, even by virtue of that opposition—self and other are a contradictory and inseparable whole, and that the adversarial other is not an enemy to be suppressed but an essential and beneficial contributor to the growth and well-being of the national self. The aim of ironic discourse on the nation's identity is to challenge the wit in order to constantly rethink the dialectical relation between national self and otherness. A classic, the technique of the weaker *eirōn* outwitting the martial but unsuspecting *alazōn* becomes particularly handy for subaltern, marginalized cultures that have been predilect victims of historical trauma at the hands of imperial or colonial powers.

This manifold picture of nationalist discourse in modern and recent Romanian history indicates a cultural dispute between four competing discourses on the (re)construction of the nation. These different discursive templates of nationalism become predominant to various degrees and in various social contexts or quarters through sustained processes of enculturation. Such processes involve canonical reinforcement through formal and informal institutions until any of these versions of the nation is embraced by larger groups of national subjects. Resting on the theoretical grounds of Norman Fairclough and other critical discourse analysts, Michał Krzyżanowski and Aleksandra Galasińska have also concluded that social (re)construction in critical or traumatic historical contexts such as postcommunist Europe is effected through the public interaction and “operationalization” of multiple identity-forging discourses:

Particularly in contexts of crisis and instability, groups of social agents and agencies seem to develop diverse and competing strategies for change, and successful strategies are implemented and can lead to structural change. But from a cultural political economy perspective, strategies are partly constituted as discourses which map accounts of the past and the present and their problems and failures onto ‘imaginaries’ for the future. Where strategies are successful, their implementation entails dialectical relations and transformations between discourses and other moments of the social: the operationalisation of discourses and narratives in wider social and material changes, their enactment in new practices, institutions, organisational routines and so on, their inculcation in new identities, and their materialisation in changes in the physical world. (2009, p. 26)

In the face of the obvious predominance of antithetical nationalism, the more conflictual of the four possible discourses on national identity, whose exaggeration has often been led to physical or symbolic conflicts, it appears that the frequency and magnitude of such conflicts may be minimized by a steady and widespread counter-enculturation of alternative nationalist discourses through public institutions and practices like the education system, the media, public and political campaigning etc. We would do well to promote the other three less or non-conflictual versions of nationalism in the public space. Inculcating them in social consciousness would encourage a more open and relaxed attitude towards nationalism and ethno-cultural identity. The increased presence of such alternative nationalist discourses might help disperse the reserve or repulsiveness with which nationalism is met by its usual critics who reduce it to exclusionary and intolerant attitudes. As one astute scholar of discursive violence has put it: “[c]onflict resolution is thus a recognition of the multiple and shifting identities of individuals all of which constitute the basis of communicative interaction” (Jabri, 1996, p. 119-20). Rather than hold anyone accountable for their legitimate desire to cultivate a sense of national belonging—which some critics of nationalism do out of a misconceived fear that this will automatically lead to ethnic or cultural wars—, we should encourage the non-conflictual

discourses of analogical, metaphoric, and ironic nationalism to become more vigorous canonical alternatives to the routine antagonistic representations of the nation.

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